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BLACK

PHILOFICTION BLACK, COLOUR, LIGHT, NON-LARUELLE, NON-PHILOSOPHY

Laruelle often speaks of the black universe and that philosophy is not dark enough. But what is black? Is black a color and if so, can we see it?

Reza Negarestani has provided a mix of theory and fiction in his book *Cyclonopedia*, depicting the Earth as a quasi-living creature with oil circulating in its veins. Oil, of course, is black in color, but it is also light, insofar as it is a transmutation of sunlight. Oil is the geological product of sunlight, produced first by photosynthesis and second by the decomposition of plant matter in

time. In this sense, oil, according to Negarestani, is the black carcass of the sun.

Alexander Galloway, in his book *Laruelle. Against the Digital* addressed the question of the black universe in detail. As there are two kinds of light, so there are two kinds of darkness. Nebulae and dust possess obscuring qualities, they strangle light and they interfere with the capacities to see. At the same time, they possess their own form of brightness. The fog shines with a certain spatiality. It transforms a space with absolute coordinates into a proximal zone governed by thresholds of intelligibility. Fog is a dioptric phenomenon, even if it obstructs vision. It is about how light scatters through the material, that is, the fog is part of an illuminant, although it does not emit light itself, even if it has a brightness of its own due to the filtering and relaying of light.

Diotropy refers to light when it is refracted, for example, by a transparent material such as glass or water. As part of the optical sciences, diotropy deals with prisms and lenses. A diotropic instrument can divide white light into colored light, while under certain conditions colored light can be converted back into white light.

Catoptric refers to light when it is reflected. (1) While diotropics deals with lenses, catoptrics deals with mirrors, screens, and opaque surfaces. There is also some capacity for chromaticity in catoptrics because some objects reflect certain colors and absorb other colors. To make a long story short, diotropics poses the problem of transparency, while catoptrics poses the problem of opacity. The former includes perspective (looking through), while the latter includes an aspect or mirror (reflecting, looking at).

Both optical sciences, according to Alexander Galloway, possess a relation to depth. While reflection is semiotically deep, that is, taking up the question of meaning, refraction is empirically deep, that is, concerning subjective experience. Semiotic deepness means that opaque reflection creates a model of depth in which two opposing levels, one manifest and one latent, work together to produce meaning. Freud and some Marxisms work in this way. Empirical deepness means that transparent refraction creates a depth model in which a volumetric space is created that is presented to a looking project. Galloway suspects this model in Kant and Heidegger.

The two optical sciences also differ on the question of flatness. Reflection is optically flat insofar as it manifests itself in two-dimensional surfaces, while refraction is ontologically flat. The latter is immanent to its material; there is no metaphysical or transcendent ground operating behind the phenomenon. What is immanent must also be flat. Refraction always remains within itself.

Dioptric refers to the subject insofar as a real or lucid experience comes into play, its illuminations being related on the one hand to the Enlightenment, on the other hand to Romanticism up to Heidegger and Phenomenology. The catoptric with its reference to meaning is on the side of the pharmakon. Although subjects may be involved, the process here is primarily never subjective, rather the subject is externalized. This process ends for Galloway in the culture industry, the spectacle, in ideology but also in critique procedures of structuralism.

Illumination refers to the actions of transparent bodies in their luminosity, the sun, the moon,

humanity – bodies that are less white than bright/luminous. It is the light of life and consciousness. It is a perspective, connected to the dioptric and the iris.

In contrast, the light (lux) refers to the properties of an opaque body in relation to its being. It is the light of God, the light of being, a cosmological light associated with the catoptric and Hermes. It is singular and never multiple. It is white only insofar as its whiteness is a pure opacity.

Now what does this mean for darkness? Darkness may be gloomy or shadowy. Think of the dust, the night or the twilight. Bodies may be dark. Material may be dark as if asleep, unconscious or cold. The sun is darkened by smoke. We are not talking about an ontological darkness here, but that of the world. But there is another darkness, the tenebrae, the shadows of black, which were separated from the light (lux) of the sky in formation.

Galloway elicits two varieties of light – the lux as a purely opaque source and the lumen as the action of the transparent body. And there are two kinds of darkness – the obscuring and the shadow of a black being. But all this – from black to white and from dark to light – still remains within the framework of the standard model of philosophy. If black is mainly the absence of white, dark the absence of light, then we remain trapped in a world of relations, reflections, continuities and convertibilities. Black-as-white and white-as-light.

Galloway is not only interested in darkness, but asks for a profound blackness. This is the generic darkness of the abyss, the void and the vacuum, the darkness of catastrophe and cataclysm. It is a cosmological blackness, the black of Satan, the black of the absolutely devilish, the black of non-being. We are not asking if the world will become dark, but the blackness points to a world without us. It is not a question of dying or growing cold, but of the disappearance of being, i.e. of absolute closure; in this sense, the shadows of black are not part of an ontology, rather they constitute a crypto-ontology.

Crypts are places of seclusion. Andrew Culp, in his book *Dark Deleuze*, uses the crypt to introduce conspiracy, which is driven by negativity. The task is to use negation to say “no” to those who tell us to accept world as it is. The crucial step is Deleuze’s non-dialectical negation, the difference that operates as a distance between two exclusive ways. One should not replace angelic with mysterious messages.

Only in relation to the black as *kruptos*, closed with respect to being, it is possible to understand what Laruelle understands by the black universe. Only by subtracting from the system of light and color can one see the generically real of blackness. There is a transition from the color black that can be seen to black as a non-color that cannot be seen, even more, a transition to a nothing-to-see that can in turn be seen. The black is the non-color, the non-existence of a non-universe that precedes the possibility of the universe. According to Laruelle, this idea of black is a cosmological principle. Black is constitutive of thought and its limits. Separated from the world of which we form a human, all-human image, and from the earth on whose surface we live, there is an indifferent, opaque, black universe. The black that precedes the light is the non-substance of the universe, that which fled from the world before the world was born into the world. But we are always led to think of the universe as something that is out there, the factory of the universe

that can be seen and felt, or a color, a purely phenomenological blackness. In contrast, the blackness is to be thought of in the non-universe, which was not temporally before the universe, nor will come in a kind of cataclysm. It is always already there, but one cannot see it, although one sees it. The black stands for radical infinity or nothingness, best of all for subtraction, and is always already ultra-black.

Galloway refers at this point to the 1804 Constitution of Haiti, which states that regardless of skin color, all citizens are called black. This pure blackness, such a cataclysm of human color, suspends color and negates the endless dynamic of black as white or white as black. Black no longer refers to the limiting case, no longer refers to slavery, to the poor, or to the indebted worker. Black, Galloway argues, is the condition for a new Uchromia, a new utopia of color based on the generic black universe.

“Our uchromia: learning to think from the perspective of blackness, that is what determines rather than limits color in the last instance” (Laruelle). Color always has a position, an attitude. The spectrum of colors contains a complex field of differences; the primary colors retain their determinant positions, while other colors complement each other as contrasts. The position of color governs the continuum of light and darkness, insofar as color leads into luminous, supersaturated visibility or disappears into sunless darkness.

With the help of photography Laruelle wants to intervene, insofar as the light enters through an opening and writes itself on a surface, on photographs that reflect black light for the viewer. Laruelle argues for a unilateralized dioptric, insofar as he rejects the reduplication and extension of the eye and demands an immanent identity or transparency. But at the same time, he argues for a unilateralized catoptric, insofar as he demands a pure opacity with respect to the One, a pure density, a pure impermeability.

The philosophers say that humanity must always refer to seeing, while Laruelle says that the decision is never between looking and seeing. The true decision would be to see in the first instance – we decide every time we open our eyes.

Photography has always been understood as color, even black-and-white photography, but never as black photography. Only in this can the black universe be inscribed. Laruelle calls this the “hyperphenomenology of the real,” which follows a logic of auto-impression, not expression. Not a clichéd snapshot, but the immanent identity of the real.

Laruelle: Simplify the color, see black and think white. Rather see black than believe the unconscious. Rather see white than that you give credence to the conscious. Do not see, become visionaries. Stop seeing and become visionaries. The gawkers and sensation seekers see white, they see only the things they always see. Those who see black are the true clairvoyants. The black seer is the true visionary, he is a medium, and in this respect the media theory must think the black universe.

Laruelle writes that all philosophical speculation aims at communication, and communication is always speculative. Deleuze/Guattari write, “We do not lack communication, on the contrary: we

have too much of it ... We lack resistance to the present." They agree with Laruelle: meaning, more and more meaning! Information, always more information!, that is the mantra of the hermeneutic-logical difference that incessantly mixes the terms truth and communication, the real and the information. In this "self-inscribed world", says Laruelle in unison with the dark Deleuze, the last secret must indeed be uncovered and communicated, everything that has not yet been said is only there to be said at last. For Laruelle, the communicative decision is even more insidious than the philosophical decision: it is one thing to say that everything that exists has a sufficient reason, but it is another thing to demand that everything that exists for any reason should be communicated. If the philosophical decision is a variant of the principle of sufficient reason, the communicative decision adds absolute communicability as an insidious aperçu. It is capital with its intemperance and the politics of its states that pursue the goal of perfect communication and pure transparency and yet can only come infinitesimally close to it, and this explains the paranoid-depressive tendency of this age, which begins to cover everything like an unbearable trail of slime.

Conventional media theory always relates the discussion in the question of the subject to two scenarios: either speculation in relation to the Other or in relation to oneself. Either a liberal relativism on behalf of the Other or the eye-for-an-eye of the Old Testament. Instead, the black universe allows for a mystical subject to whom all speculation is alien. It demands an absolutely determined and unidirectional vision to which even the postmodern multiplicity of voices is alien. Laruelle proposes us to subtract ourselves from the system of color and enter a radical and unilateral black universe. In this universe, black is never defined in the terms of light, it is not interchangeable with anything and cannot be made visible through illumination. The black universe has not been seen by anyone until today. There is only a negative intuition, so we finally dare to call it the ultimate color. This also characterizes the new politics of the Black Bloc.

It is about a new form of black justice that is unilaterally determined by the real, but never by a worldly reality. If you open your eyes just a little bit, you will see white, but if you open them all the way, you will see black. We are this night.

When Michel Foucault writes that I see myself in the mirror where I am not, in an unreal space that opens virtually behind the surface, where the mirror also keeps me in a space that is quite real while I see myself in the mirror, and that even connects me to my surroundings, which at the same time are again unreal because I perceive them only through the mirror, then today (in Foucault-speak) the computer turns out to be a kind of (invisible) electronic mirror (between at least two computers), where the utopia of virtual space - I see myself where I am not, namely as text or as a video image - and the heterotopia of real space - the computer and my surroundings exist in real terms while I am typing some nonsense - enter into a sometimes compulsive and painful union. The mirror image is an art product, a generation, its use a

narcissistic, sometimes even a painful self-dramatization - for example, when John Cocteau in the film "The Blood of the Poet" goes through the mirror without destroying it, or think of the distorting or burning mirrors -, in any case, there are countless montage or photomontage techniques, 3D simulations, scientific debates and discourses about the observer status à la Einstein or John von Neumann, which question the status of self- and world knowledge through (mirror) reflection. On the other hand, consumers or media users demand that the medium, no matter what is being communicated, acts as a non-distorting mirror that provides a frame and should not distort messages, a mirror that, however, remains invisible or hidden behind its own reflection. Images are produced by inverse mirror images, some proximity is created despite the distance, optical effects are transformed into electrical and electromagnetic effects and transformed back again, mirroring disappears into the invisible. It is about the struggle with the code. Mirror images can show how in a hall of mirrors a person dissolves through the set of virtual images. The real object is reflected in the mirror image as in the virtual object, which in turn surrounds and reflects the real object. The image that emerges is both an actual and a virtual image. This is what Foucault wanted to say with Deleuze: to be the appearance of the reflected and this appearance are double. The mirror image is virtual with respect to the actual thing it captures, but at the same time the thing in the mirror is actual, which leaves a simple virtuality of the thing and displaces it from the image. Why is this so? The physical theory of appearance says the following: First, all non-self-radiating bodies are mirrors, the most perfect body being that which does not absorb radiation but rejects it. The mirror is "invisible" because of its intransparency. Apparently, the mirror appears only in the duplication of the appearance of other bodies. On this Lucretius makes the distinction between imago and simulacrum, but this doubling is for physics only a change of the direction of the steeling. In the mirror one sees the appearances only in another direction. What is appearance, image? Differentiation of things presented in two ways, reflection, which makes the surface of the bodies, and absorption, which comes from the depth. Meeting of radiation and force are the projection of a look. The knowledge of the phenomena is to reflect them faithfully, as an effort of the body to deny its power of absorption, that is, to become like the mirror, that is, to reflect things as clearly as they were. Pure reflective surface. At the same time, the visual space opened in the mirror is mirror image, which is permeated with illusions, at least in relation to the body. A sinic unity is imagined in the gaze, but thwarted by the mirror image, namely the successive and simultaneous unity of the body. The mirror thus provokes the transcendental unity as a problem I think, because it thwarts the sensual unity, which however opens space for objective illusions, the factual indistinguishability of virtual and

actual image in the mirror image, while they are de jure distinguished. The reflection of the cow in the water is an effect of the appearance of the cow on the meadow. On the one hand I can consider the cow on the meadow as appearance, on the other hand its reflection in the water as mirror image of the same, whose representation in the medium in my imagination again can change into everything possible, image, mirage etc.. The mirror image stands out from the reflection, i.e., that which was before the image becomes the model in the image, i.e., the view as reflection blurs. We are in the medium, medium functions here (apparently) as a non-distorting mirror, which stages by its frame a somehow significant selection concerning the mirrored. In order for optical appearances to become recognizable as reflections, the mirrored body must come into view, so that one can assume that the mirrored appearance is the effect of an optical cause, which can be transposed into another appearance, such as light reflection of things. Reflections and echoes increase the sight and sound of appearances, extend ranges and dispersions of the messages, which must constantly suggest the new, economically they must produce it, in order to keep the uncertainty and the fear awake. Curiosity does not even want to reach the new, for which it craves. Uncertainty is to be held and solved in the tension. Digital cross-sectional images, computerized (CT) or nuclear magnetic resonance tomography painlessly cut the bodies, the computer extrapolating synthetic images based on a set of data into which the body is technologically translated.

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